THOUGHTS

ON

DANCING:

OCCASIONED BY SOME LATE

TRANSACTIONS

AMONG THE

PEOPLE called *METHODISTS.*

By M. DAVIS.

LONDON:

PRINTED and SOLD by C. PARAMORE, *Chapel-Street, Holywell-Mount;* alſo by B. LAW, *Ave-Maria-Lane*; W. DEANE, at the Gate of the *Royal-Exchange*; and J. JAMES, No. 70, *Leadenhall-Street.* M,DCC,XCI.

[*Price SIXPENCE.*]

BRITISH MUSEUM

THE

PREFACE.

IN the Minutes of the Conference of the Preachers, late in connexion with the Rev. Mr. J. Weſley, held at Mancheſter the laſt week in July, 1791, the following queſtions and anſwers are found.

"Queſt. 32. Have we not made too great ad-
"vances towards conformity to the world?"

"Anſw. We fear we have."

"Q. 33. How ſhall we prevent this?"

"A. Thoſe ſchool-maſters and ſchool-miſtreſſes who receive dancing-maſters into their ſchools, and thoſe parents who employ dancing-maſters for their children, ſhall be no longer members of our ſociety."

When I read this laſt anſwer I was both ſurprized and grieved; becauſe I conſidered it rather calculated to give offence, and ſtir up ſtrife, than to correct a fault. For many years back I have viewed dancing as repreſented in the following Thoughts. Parents, ſchool-maſters, and ſchool-miſtreſſes, in connexion with the people called Methodiſts, are as far from wiſhing their children and ſcholars to abuſe this part of their youthful education, by frequenting balls, aſſemblies, &c. when they grow up, as they are careful to prevent an abuſe of the firſt and moſt neceſſary part of their youthful education, namely reading, by recommending to their peruſal and ſtudy moral and religious writings, inſtead of putting into their hands lewd or profane books. However, I hoped that this rule or law, like ſome others concerning dreſs, tobacco, &c. made by Mr. Weſley many years ago, would ſleep reſpecting execution; and conſequently, might be conſidered as merely expreſſive of the private opinion of the framers. This thought ſo ſatisfied my mind, that I really forgot the ſubject for about three weeks; till at a meeting of Preachers the 26th of Auguſt laſt, it was, unexpected by me, brought upon the carpet, and curſorily debated. This event cauſed me, a few days after, to commit to paper the following Thoughts on Dancing: which method I took for the purpoſe of reconſidering the ſubject with care, and alſo,

that

that I might be better prepared to deliver my ſentiments thereon, at the next quarterly meeting of Preachers. Nov. 2d, I called on Mr. James Rogers, at the Chapel-houſe, and aſked him, Whether it was meant to drop the ſubject of dancing, or to bring it on next quarterly meeting:—told him jocoſely, that I intended to ſpeak to the point; and added, Our law ought not to condemn any man before he is heard, and we conſider what he ſaith. To which he replied, "The "preachers in London cannot alter a rule of Confer-"ence: conſequently, ſaying any thing amongſt them "will anſwer no end. I have conſulted with the travel-"ling preachers that are, and have been in town lately; "and our opinion is, that you cannot any longer preach "in our connexion unleſs you immediately promiſe to "diſmiſs your dancing-maſter." This opinion is now manifeſt by the printing of what is termed their quarterly plan; and this has determined me to publiſh the preſent pamphlet.

I am very ſorry thus to be dragged into a public controverſy by men, with whom I hoped to live in the moſt cordial chriſtian friendſhip, my few remaining days on earth. I requeſted, that I might have an opportunity of delivering my ſentiments at the next quarterly meeting of preachers; but I was told, this would avail

nothing, as they had not power to make alterations, nor even to ſuſpend the execution of laws. I requeſted, that the affair might be laid aſide till next conference: becauſe I wiſhed to prevent the cauſeleſs offence that an attempt to execute ſuch a rule or law muſt neceſſarily give to many reſpectable and worthy families in our connexion: and I alſo devoutly wiſhed, not to ſtumble weak brethren by diſputes; and leaſt of all, by ſuch a diſpute as this. But the invariable anſwer to every thing I ſaid was, "The rule of Conference muſt be enforced." I will not impute *this imprudent obſtinacy* to the whole body of men called Methodiſt preachers; but to a very ſmall number, who, being in particular ſituations at preſent, think that they have gotten the reins of government in their hands: but, I imagine, they will ſoon be convinced, that the driving of Jehu is neither the moſt chriſtian, nor the moſt prudent conduct.

The late Mr. J. Weſley well knew the ſituations, and opinion ~~and conduct~~ of ſchools, and of many families, ſome of his beſt friends, on this ſubject:—he had more influence and power in the connexion than any individual, or than all who may now think that they tread in his ſhoes;—and he wanted not courage to follow his conſcience; yet he never made any rule, or law of excluſion concerning dancing. Although I never had occaſion

occaſion to converſe with him on the ſubject, I will venture to aſſert, from his well-known diſcernment and conſummate prudence, that he ranked dancing among the res indifferentiæ, reſpecting religion; innocent or ſinful, according to the mind and circumſtances of the perſon practiſing.

We neither are more holy, nor in the eyes of diſcerning men do we appear to be ſo, by manifeſting vehement zeal concerning the tythe of mint, aniſe and cummin; but by a conſtant regard to, and earneſt recommendation of, the weightier matters of God's law, judgement, mercy and faith. Superſtition is ſometimes called tenderneſs of conſcience, and falſe zeal ſtands in the room of devotion and brotherly love. It is a humbling truth for mankind, as it betrays both our ignorance and our evil propenſities, that as well in religion as in politics, many who ſeem in earneſt to reach the ſummit of human perfection, are often gratifying the vanity of their mind, by attempting to ſhoot beyond the mark, and thereby they miſs taking right aim. When this is the caſe either with a religious, or a civil ſect, the leaders of the party are certainly more blameable than the bulk of the people; becauſe they *do know*, or they *ought to know* better; and yet they make advantage of the ignorance of *the many*, to obtain or maintain a point, in

which they think that the honour of their character, or their intereſt is concerned. This obſervation has been exemplified by the indiſcriminate exclamations and denunciations of divine vengeance againſt dancing, with which the New-Chapel, in the City-Road, has lately reſounded: and, probably, ſo ſoon as this pamphlet is read, all the thunder of that place will be hurled againſt it. But there are hearers under that roof who have judgement as well as ears, and whoſe zeal is regulated by ſound underſtanding.

I know that there are very many in the religious connexion to which I particularly addreſs this pamphlet, whoſe circumſtances and ſituations in life prevent them having any concern in the debate; and I alſo know that the religious prejudices of almoſt all run in a line diametrically oppoſite to my repreſentations. But I requeſt ſuch to believe, that it is poſſible they may have conceived wrongly concerning an exerciſe ſo much abuſed; and alſo that it is with much reluctancy I lay ſuch a debate as this before the public: which, indeed, they may conclude from the endeavours that I uſed to ſettle the point privately, as well as from the nature of the ſubject itſelf. It muſt be in the view of all, but thoſe immediately concerned, too immaterial to be made a ſubject of controverſy.

Sed

Sed "hæ nugæ ſeria ducent."

None, I hope, will ſet themſelves up for judges, until they have with candour made themſelves acquainted with the nature of the diſpute. And as I wiſh that every one who has curioſity to read this pamphlet, may, without prejudice and without partiality, weigh what is offered to his conſideration: ſo I ſincerely pray, that none may indulge a reſentful or cenſorious ſpirit, whatever the reſult of his enquiry may be.

I give my thoughts to the public juſt as I penned them, with a deſign to communicate them to, what is termed among the Methodiſts, the quarterly meeting of preachers. If that expedient had been allowed me, perhaps they never had ſeen the light. I have only conſulted my Bible, human nature, and my ſituation in life, in revolving the ſubject in my mind. An ingenious friend to whom I mentioned my deſign of publiſhing ſomething on dancing, recommended to my peruſal what Mr. Lock and Mr. Addiſon have ſaid thereon; to whom I could only reply, It is more than thirty years ſince I read *The Spectator*, or *Lock on Education*; but I will certainly avail myſelf of the lights of ſuch good authors, if I am obliged farther to conſider the matter.

I thank

I thank the bountiful provider for man, I have hitherto lived decently and comfortably without either receiving, or ſeeking for any thing from the people called Methodiſts, as a preacher; and I hope to enjoy this cauſe of boaſting all my days: I therefore can loſe nothing of a temporal nature by ten thouſand internal regulations introduced by *new men*. But I have old friends in that connexion from whom I cannot be ſeparated; and who, I flatter myſelf, will not abandon me, either as a private chriſtian, or as a preacher of the goſpel. I wiſh to improve in heart religion and practical godlineſs, by the excellencies, by the weakneſſes, and even by the faults of fellow-chriſtians. Our Lord has many ways of bringing us to truſt *intirely* in him, and to follow him *only*. May we all carefully learn the important leſſons that his various providences teach us! And both bear with each other, and forgive one another, even as God for Chriſt's ſake hath forgiven us!

LAYTONSTONE, ESSEX,
Dec. 12, 1791.

THOUGHTS

THOUGHTS

ON

DANCING, &c.

DANCING, ſo far as we mean to take it under conſideration, may be viewed,

I. As a natural manner of expreſſing our joy.

II. As an art whereby we are taught a good carriage, a graceful and eaſy way of moving our limbs, and a genteel manner of addreſs.

1. Dancing conſidered as geſtures of nature excited by pleaſure, eſpecially in youth, who are always greatly diſpoſed for action if in health, is as natural, and as innocent, abſtractedly conſidered, as ſmiling, laughing, talking, or any other natural manner of expreſſing our joy. This kind of dancing always has, and always will

will be practiſed by human beings on certain occaſions. Our firſt exertions in this way are generally as unpremeditated, and as involuntary as laughing, crying, ſuddenly removing from apparent danger, or approaching to, what we imagine to be, lawful or innocent pleaſure. As our fixed temper, or habit of mind, always, more or leſs, gives a caſt to our countenance, and general manner of behaviour; ſo every ſudden paſſion has its external expreſſion in one way or another. Art, indeed, teaches us to conceal or diſguiſe, on many occaſions, and in various ways, the external expreſſions of our paſſions and tempers; but, however much we may be on our guard, we ſometimes involuntarily throw off our diſguiſe, and diſcover our mental feelings by our features, our tongues, or by ſome ſudden motions of our body or limbs. Children when greatly pleaſed, or greatly angered, as naturally dance as they laugh or cry: and grown perſons would do the ſame, were they not under the influence of what are called rules of decorum. If our joy be innocent, our outward expreſſion of it by dancing can have no more guilt in it than there is in a joyful countenance, or a joyful tongue. "David, we are told in 2 Sam. vi. 14, 16, leaped and *danced* before the Lord with all his might, in bringing up the ark of God from the houſe of Obed Edom to Zion." Michal, his wife, upbraided him, for having, in her opinion, behaved indecorouſly, conſidering his exalted ſtation in life; to whom he replied, "It was before the Lord I played, and I will be yet more vile." Certainly, David's joy was on this occaſion religious joy: but it was the joy of a man, not of an angel;

angel; and being violent joy, it diſcovered itſelf in the natural and artleſs way of dancing before the Lord.

Biſhop Patrick tells us, in his comment on this text, from Ludolphi Hiſtoria Æthiopica, "That the Abyſſinians, both men and women, meet together in their churches on the eve of our Lord's reſurrection, and employ the whole night in ſinging, *dancing*, and clapping their hands, accompanied by ſeveral inſtruments of muſic, till morning light. Which practice, he adds, in all likelihood came from the Jews, who ſtill dance in ſome of their feſtivals." He likewiſe obſerves from Plato, Lib. 7, de legibus, "That ſome dances are εμμελῶς, with modeſt and decent motions, and others πλημμελῶς, immodeſt and wanton." And a late author ſays, "Though dancing would now be looked upon as the higheſt degree of profanation in a religious aſſembly, yet it is certain, that dancing, conſidered as an expreſſion of joy, is no more a profanation than ſinging, or than ſimply ſpeaking; nor can it be thought in the leaſt more abſurd, that a chriſtian ſhould dance for joy that Jeſus Chriſt is riſen from the dead, than that David danced before the ark when it was returned to him after a long abſence." Encyclopædia Britannica, p. 661.

It is indeed ſtrange, that any perſons, who profeſs to regard the authority of holy writ, ſhould venture to condemn dancing altogether; ſeeing that it is frequently mentioned in ſcripture as a natural and innocent man-

ner

ner of expreſſing our joy, and not ſeldom as an act of religious worſhip.

In Judges xi. 34, we are told, that Jephthah, returning from the ſlaughter of the Ammonites, was met by his daughter and her companions "with timbrels and with *dances*."

1 Sam. xviii. 6, 7, informs us, that "the women came out of all the cities of Iſrael, ſinging and *dancing*, with tabrets, with joy, and with inſtruments of muſic: and they anſwered one another as they played and ſaid, Saul hath ſlain his thouſands, and David his ten thouſands." It ſeems from this account, that they formed themſelves into ſeparate choirs, or companies, and that their motions in dancing were regulated by the harmony of their muſic.

In 1 Kings i. 40, it is ſaid, at the coronation of Solomon "all the people came up after him tripudiantes ad tibias, i. e. *dancing* to flutes, as Robertſon, in his Theſaurus Linguæ Sanctæ, renders the word מחוללים, and rejoiced with great joy, ſo that the earth rent with the ſound of them."

Exod. xv. 20, 21, relates, that "Miriam the propheteſs, the ſiſter of Aaron, took a timbrel in her hand, and all the women went out after her with timbrels and with *dances*: and Miriam anſwered them, Sing ye to Jehovah, for he hath triumphed glorioufly; the horſe and the rider hath he thrown into the ſea." This

ſtory

ſtory alſo favours the foregoing conjecture. May we not ſuppoſe, that Miriam and her company of women formed themſelves into a ſeparate choir, and that their joyous motions were regulated by their muſic vocal, and inſtrumental, while they repeated the triumphant words of the 21ſt verſe?

David in Pſal. xxx. 11, ſays, addreſſing himſelf to Jehovah, "Thou haſt turned my mourning into *dancing*." In Pſal. cxlix. 3, it is ſaid, "Let them praiſe his name in the *dance*." In Pſal. cl. 4, "Praiſe him with the timbrel and *dance*." And Pſal. lxxxvii. 7, is rendered by Buxtorf in his Hebrew Lexicon, "Et cantantes æque ac tripudiantes; i. e. As well the ſingers as the *dancers ſhall be there*."

From theſe paſſages we may certainly conclude, 1. That dancing was practiſed in the religious worſhip of the Jewiſh Church: and 2dly. That it was connected with, and conſequently regulated by, muſic both vocal and inſtrumental.

And here I hope that I ſhall be excuſed in obſerving; There are three verbs in the Hebrew language, each of which is tranſlated *to dance* in our Engliſh Bible.

Firſt, רקד, rakad, which Buxtorf renders ſalire, ſubſilire, to leap, to jump, to ſkip. This verb is uſed in Pſal. cxiv. 4, 6, where it is ſaid, "The mountains ſkipped like rams, and the little hills like lambs." And

in

in Pſal. xxix. 6, deſcribing the awful effects of lightning and thunder, under the majeſtic idea of "the voice of Jehovah which maketh the cedars of Lebanon to ſkip like a calf, Lebanon and Sirion like a young unicorn." And in its participial form in 1 Chron. xv. 29, "Michal, the daughter of Saul, looking out at a window, ſaw king David *dancing* and playing." And alſo in Lev. ii. 21. Job xxi. 11. Eccleſ. iii. 4. Iſa. xiii. 21. Joel ii. 5. Nahum iii. 2.

2dly. כדר, charar: Robertſon, in his Theſaurus Linguæ Sanctæ, tells us, that this verb expreſſes, paſtus ſaltavit, ſatur exiliit; i. e. the joy and activity of animals well fed. It is found but in two places of ſacred ſcripture. 2 Sam. vi. 14, "David *danced* before the Lord with all his might; and Michal, Saul's daughter, looked through a window, and ſaw king David leaping and *dancing* before the Lord." And in Iſa. lxvi. 20, "And they ſhall bring all your brethren for an offering unto the Lord, out of all nations, in equis deſultoriis, on *dancing* or prancing horſes."

3dly. חלל, chalal. Buxtorf tells us, that this verb ſignifies, perforari, perfodi, to have a hole made through, to be dug through; from which comes the ſubſtantive, חליל, chalil, tibia, fiſtula, a pipe, a flute; becauſe theſe muſical inſtruments were at firſt made of reeds bored; and alſo the ſubſtantive מחול, machul, chorus, a choir, i. e. cætus tripudiantium ſeu ad numeros incedentium; a company of flute-players dancing to their muſic.

Concerning

Concerning this word we may firſt obſerve, It is never uſed, as the two former verbs are, to expreſs the joyous motions of brute animals; but it is confined to man. And 2dly. It expreſſes the joyous motions rather of a company than of an individual, accompanied with, and regulated by muſic: So that in fact, it ſignifies dancing practiſed as an art. See Pſal. cxlix. 3. Pſal. cl. 4. Jer. xxxi. 4, 13. Pſal. xxx. 11. Lam. v. 15. Exod. xxxii. 19. 1 Sam. xviii. 6. 1 Sam. xxx. 16. 1 Sam. xxi. 11. 1 Sam. xxix. v. Judges xxi. 21. Exod. xv. 20. Judges xi. 34.

In the New Teſtament dancing is mentioned but in three or four places, and as it were by the by; yet without any brand of cenſure.

In Matt. xi. 17, and in its parallel place, Luke vii. 32, our Lord ſays, "We have piped unto you, καὶ οὐκ ὠρχήσασθε and ye have not danced." Matt. xiv. 6. and its parallel place, Mark vi. 22, informs us, "that the daughter of Herodias ὠρχήσατο danced and pleaſed Herod." And Luke xv. 25, mentions the return of the prodigal ſon celebrated in his father's houſe with muſic καὶ χορῶν and dancing." It is worth obſerving, the Greek ſubſtantive χορὸς comes from the Hebrew verb חרר charar, ſalio, I leap, and has the very ſame meaning as the Hebrew ſubſtantive, מחול machul, cætus canentium et ſaltantium, a company of ſingers and dancers.

But there is a paſſage in Acts iii. 8, which I wiſh to be particularly noticed; becauſe I really think, it mi-

litates in favour of all that I have ſaid concerning dancing as an innocent expreſſion of joy, and even allowable, in ſome circumſtances, in religious worſhip.

The impotent man, who had never walked, being miraculouſly endued with ſtrength in his limbs by Peter, in the name of Jeſus Chriſt, *leaped up* from the ground whereon he had lain, *ſtood, and walked; and* his loving grateful heart urging him publicly to acknowledge the ineſtimable favour received, he *entered into the temple* with Peter and John not only *walking*, but *leaping and praiſing God.*" See alſo, Acts xiv. 10.

The Greek verb αλλομαι ſalio, I leap or jump, from which the participles αλλόμενος leaping, and εξαλλόμενος leaping up, are formed, comes from the Hebrew verb חלל, chalal, ſaltare, tripudiare, to leap, to dance, to ſkip along; and αλλόμενος leaping, coincides in meaning with the Hebrew participle מכרכר, ſaliens, in 2 Sam. vi. 14, which is tranſlated *dancing*. It is the geſture of nature, that ſudden and great joy will always in ſome meaſure excite; eſpecially in youth, who feel it both eaſy and pleaſant to uſe violent exerciſe.*

Secondly:

* Doctor Coke, I am told, has been confined to his chamber for ſome weeks, by an accident which greatly injured one of his legs. Although he has ſo vehemently condemned dancing; yet, I preſume, the graveſt perſon of his congregation would, on reading this ſtory of the lame man miraculouſly healed, at leaſt

Secondly: Dancing may be considered as an art, whereby we are taught a good carriage, a graceful and easy way of moving our limbs, and a genteel manner of address.

Children are taught to dance for the purpose of giving to them a good carriage. What is called a bad carriage is not only very awkward, and consequently very injurious to the external appearance of a young person; but it is also, generally, very hurtful to health. Many children, particularly females, grow up deformed, through our inattention to their carriage in very early infancy. They contract ungraceful, awkward habits of sitting, standing, and walking. Female children, in general, are more delicate, use less exercise, and grow faster than male children; and consequently, are more in danger of growing deformed. We may add hereunto, tyrant fashion confines them more in their dress: And yet it is of greater consequence to them as individuals, and to mankind universally, that they should enjoy good health, and possess all the graces of person that their make and countenance will admit of. It cannot be an indifferent matter to parents, whether their children, especially daughters, are crooked or straight in body and limbs; whether they are stiff and awkward, or graceful and easy in carriage and behaviour. We think it lawful and right, if our circum-

least excuse the zealous Doctor, if, when he is perfectly restored to the use of his limbs, he should enter into the New Chapel, walking, and *leaping*, and praising God.

ſtances can afford the expence, to have our children taught languages, arts and ſciences; muſic, perhaps, vocal or inſtrumental; and I know not that any precept can be juſtly drawn from the chriſtian religion prohibiting us to have them taught to ſit, ſtand, walk and behave in a graceful and eaſy manner. The man called a dancing-maſter can teach theſe things ſooner and better than any other perſon: and the accompaniments of muſic both aſſiſt and pleaſe in giving and receiving his inſtructions. But it may be objected, "This is teaching them to dance; and when they grow up they will frequent balls and aſſemblies, and in theſe places gratify all the vanity and luſt of their hearts, throw away their money and time, form bad connexions, and ruin themſelves probably both in this world and in another." To this objection I beg leave to reply; It is not true in fact, that all young people, who have learned to dance, thus abuſe this part of their education. Perhaps not one in ten is very fond of the amuſement, even of thoſe whoſe parents think it neither criminal nor dangerous that their children ſhould occaſionally attend balls, aſſemblies, &c. But when a child knows, that his parent puts him into the hands of a dancing-maſter *only* that he may be taught carriage and addreſs, the child, as well as the parent, has this *alone* in view. If, when your ſon grows up to manhood, he unhappily becomes extravagantly fond of dancing, he will purſue the amuſement for ſome time, whether or no he was taught in his childhood; and probably with greater eagerneſs if he was not taught; for novelty has a powerful effect on the human mind,

eſpecially

eſpecially in our youth. But ſuch imprudent conduct is neither a natural nor a neceſſary conſequence of the education that you have given him: It is an abuſe of it. And what part of education may not be abuſed? You have had your child taught to read, and you wiſh him or her to contract a fondneſs for reading. You are at laſt gratified in your wiſh. But the only books that your ſon will read are the looſeſt novels and plays which he can lay his hands on; or, thoſe artful metaphyſical treatiſes which have been publiſhed againſt chriſtianity by men who were free thinkers, becauſe they would be free livers. You have had your child taught muſic; and he is now ſo vain of his ſkill in playing on the violin, running over the keys of the harpſichord, or blowing the flute, that he ſpends a great deal more time and money in muſical entertainments than either his fortune, or his buſineſs, can ſupport and permit. Perhaps alſo, he has got connected with ſome artful muſical lady, who charms him by her voice and ſkill in playing. Was it wrong to have had theſe young perſons taught reading or muſic in their childhood, becauſe they now make ſo bad a uſe of the education that they then received? Surely no. We muſt learn to diſtinguiſh between the right uſe, and the abuſe of things, or we ſhall ever be guilty of ridiculous miſtakes when we ſet up for caſuiſts or lawgivers.

Mr. J. Weſley, many years back, made rules concerning tea, tobacco, drams, dreſs, &c. which he found, by experience, too minute and too frivolous to be executed with rigour: "Bruta fulmina et vana." He

therefore rather recommended, than enforced his rules. But he never ventured to make any rule or law concerning dancing: That buſineſs remained for his wiſer and more zealous ſucceſſors to accompliſh. If I am not wrongly informed, he ſaid more than once, not only in families, but alſo in meeting the married women in London, "I have no objection againſt your daughters being taught carriage, addreſs, and even to dance a minuet; but you muſt be careful reſpecting the company into which they go." And I believe it is well-known, that when it was in contemplation what kind of a maſter ſhould be employed to give the boys of Kingſwood School an outward poliſh, Mr. Weſley declared, that he had no objection againſt a dancing-maſter, if ſuch a character could be engaged under certain regulations, without giving offence to the ſerious people of the neighbourhood.

If any perſons in connexion with the people called Methodiſts encourage and ſupport the expence of their children in frequenting balls, aſſemblies, &c. of which I ſuppoſe none among us are guilty, I ſhould conclude, that the preachers in conference did their duty in reſolving to ſpeak both in private, and in public if neceſſary, againſt ſuch an evil; which is certainly a more prudent and chriſtian way of reforming mankind, than thundering out rules, or laws of excluſion from the connexion. The natural tendency of ſuch rules is, eſpecially when they are concerning things of an indifferent or doubtful nature in morals, rather to give offence than to do good. While the religion of the heart

heart is preached and practiſed among us;—while our preachers are men of piety, chriſtian zeal and prudence;—while the doctrines of Jeſus our Saviour, and the life of Jeſus our pattern, are inculcated upon us; we ſhall hardly be troubled with perſons in our connexion who notoriouſly deviate from the chriſtian character.

Almoſt every revival of religion has been diſtinguiſhed by ſome abſurd, narrow, ſuperſtitious laws or rules, by which miſtaken zeal has attempted to explain and enforce the excellent general precepts of God's word. Human refinements on God's commands will always lead to ſuperſtition, and produce cenſoriouſneſs; which are direct oppoſites to the enlightened charity of the chriſtian religion. This obſervation has been ten thouſand times verified by chriſtian communities under different names, who, forgetting the rebuke that our Maſter gave in the days of his tabernacling among us, have taught for divine "doctrines the commandments of men." Let us avoid the rock that others have ſplit upon. Let us confeſs by our conduct that the holy ſcriptures want not ſuch comments. Its precepts are therefore general, becauſe the ſituations and circumſtances of individuals are ſo various, that in many caſes no man can ſo well point out the path of duty for another, as that other may for himſelf; for no other man can be ſo perfectly acquainted with all the circumſtances of his ſituation.

But it is certain, the preſent generation in this land is wiſer and more moderate in theſe things than

ſome former were. Neither the preſent national church of England, nor the preſent national church of Scotland execute, or even attempt to defend, *all* their canons, or kirk-laws. The women among the people called Quakers have almoſt univerſally laid aſide the green apron, and neither men nor women are ſo exact in the cut of their clothes, nor in the ſize or ſhape of their hats, as they were but half a century ago. And even among the people called Methodiſts ſnuff is taken, tobacco is ſmoked, tea is drank, ruffles more than an inch broad have been commonly worn, till within the laſt two years, happily for our young people, they are gone out of faſhion: And yet we have wiſely abſtained from denouncing our anathemas.

But what is worſt of all; ſome, I fear, of our oldeſt and beſt preachers are ſometimes found with ſuch a pinch of ſnuff in their fingers as would make me ſneeze for half an hour; or, with a pipe of tobacco between their broken teeth, which would ſend me to bed ſick and lightheaded; and, moreover, if I am not wrongly informed, ſome great men among us drink their brandy and water ſo ſtrong as would make me, who am nearſighted, ſee double; and others can ſwallow down a whole pint of porter, which would really ſet me ſo faſt aſleep that I ſhould not ſee at all. And yet theſe are ſuffered to preach uſeful ſermons among us, although guilty of ſuch peccadillos.*

But

* The author of theſe Thoughts does not take tobacco in any way, nor did he ever drink a glaſs of raw ſpirits: But he does not

But to conclude quite ſeriouſly: you will obſerve, brethren, I do not mean by any thing that I have ſaid to encourage or defend the practice of frequenting balls, aſſemblies, &c. I know, from the experience of my youth, how dangerous ſuch entertainments are for young minds. But I know alſo from experience, that boys and girls under thirteen or fourteen years of age, may be taught by a dancing-maſter carriage, addreſs, &c. in their ſeparate ſchools, and may practice apart for the ſake of health and amuſement, without being aſſailed or injured by thoſe temptations, which perhaps attack young men and women in mixed dances. I will moreover obſerve, thoſe young people who have not had this tuition in their childhood, being ſenſible as they grow up to manhood of their awkwardneſs in carriage, or addreſs, if they are in what is called genteel life, they will generally procure for themſelves inſtruction in one of thoſe dancing ſchools for grown perſons, where their morals are in the greateſt danger from the mixed and low company with which they there blend. Many parents likewiſe, who are not only good friends to the Methodiſts, but alſo in our connexion, being neither convinced nor ſoftened by the knockdown argument of a threatened excluſion, will perſiſt in having their

not therefore preſume to preſcribe to, or condemn others: much leſs would he conſider ſuch abſtinences as terms of chriſtian communion. We may take the liberty of adviſing our chriſtian brethren concerning many things which appear *to us* dangerous reſpecting health or morals; but we ſhould beware of condemning: nor ſhould we make any thing a term of chriſtian communion, but what is plainly expreſſed as ſuch in God's word.

children

children taught by a dancing-master carriage, address, &c.

With regard to schoolmasters and schoolmistresses in the Methodist connexion, they are indeed in a singular predicament. The few of whom I have any knowledge have not a third, perhaps not a fourth part of their scholars, from among the people called Methodists. Probably, if each was individually questioned, the sum of their answers would nearly correspond with mine. I have employed a dancing-master in my school almost from its commencement, which is now more than twenty-two years. On a serious, and as impartial a review of the affair as I can now take, I see nothing culpable in countenancing this branch of education, under proper restrictions. My experience among boys convinces me, that most of children, whose parents can introduce them into genteel life, want a polish with regard to carriage and address, which a dancing-master can give them sooner and better than any other person. Parents who can afford the expence, require their children to be taught. Young persons who have been taught carriage and address in their childhood, and who do not now frequent balls, assemblies, &c. are certainly benefitted, and not at all injured in their morals, by the education that they then received. Of the many who have been under the tuition of a dancing-master in my house, I do not know that even one has abused this part of his youthful education, by throwing away his money and time in frequenting places of public amusement for the purpose of dancing; although many, I fear,

fear, have greatly injured both their mind and their health, by reading lewd and profane books. And two or three, who were not taught dancing while children in my houſe, now acknowledge, that they procured that inſtruction for themſelves, in their apprenticeſhip, at a conſiderable expence, and with no ſmall injury to their mind and morals.

But to conclude, by repreſenting the matter as faithfully, and in as few words as I poſſibly can,

1. Dancing viewed as geſtures of nature, expreſſive of our paſſions, muſt be as innocent, abſtractedly conſidered, as laughing, crying, talking, or walking. It is right or wrong, wiſe or fooliſh, according to the paſſion that excites it, and according to the age and character of the perſon who practiſes it. I ſhould never reproach a child, or a young perſon, with either ſin or folly, who jumped for joy, as we commonly expreſs it, on receiving a favour, or hearing good news. Nor ſhould I be more forward to condemn religious jumpers, ſeveral of whom I have heard or read concerning within theſe thirty years, than religious cryers-out, ſome of whom I have known. The fact is, nature will ſometimes break through all the reſtraints of what we call human prudence and decorum, and yet no ſin is committed. In ſome caſes, perhaps the paroxiſm is as juſtifiable as the dancing of the royal Pſalmiſt before the ark.

2. Danc ng

2. Dancing is frequently mentioned in ſcripture as an innocent expreſſion of joy;—is recorded there as an eſtabliſhed mode of religious worſhip among the Jews;—was practiſed even by ſome of the firſt converts to chriſtianity; Acts iii. 8. Acts xiv. 10. and has been practiſed, according to hiſtory, both by individuals, and chriſtian congregations, on certain occaſions. It ſeems, indeed, to be ſo nearly allied to muſic, both vocal and inſtrumental, that the arguments which are ſufficient to juſtify the practice of the latter, will alſo juſtify the practice of the former. And, if the great and frequent abuſe of muſic, is not an argument weighty enough to prohibit altogether the uſe of it, even in religious worſhip; neither is the great and frequent abuſe of dancing an argument ſufficiently weighty, to condemn dancing of every kind.

3. There can be no ſin in having children taught an erect carriage, a graceful and eaſy way of moving their limbs, and a genteel manner of addreſs. If the man called a dancing-maſter can teach them theſe things ſooner and better than any other perſon, he is the moſt proper man to be employed on the occaſion; and, if experience aſſures us, that muſic greatly aſſiſts both in giving and receiving his inſtructions, the uſe of muſic cannot be prohibited, unleſs it can be proved that the ſtudy and practice of muſic is in itſelf ſinful. The expediency of having children thus taught appears in their carriage and behaviour, and often in the degree of health and vigour which they enjoy: And the poſſibility of diſtinguiſhing and ſeparating, both in theory

and

and practice, between the uſefulneſs and the abuſe of this part of education is, I think, as eaſy and as manifeſt, as in any other branch of neceſſary or ornamental education that can be mentioned.

I therefore ſincerely wiſh, that our brethren in conference had not taken up the ſubject; or, at leaſt, that they had not ventured to determine ſo deciſively and ſo authoritatively concerning it. And I ſhall be extremely ſorry, if any of them attempt to execute their rule with rigour: on my own account, as I neither wiſh to quarrel with them, nor to withdraw from them; * and alſo on account of the credit of their character,

* This was written when I ſuppoſed that I ſhould have had an opportunity of expreſſing my thoughts on this ſubject in a certain meeting of preachers, which I find was held the 9th inſt. But three or four gentlemen, in the plenitude of their power, thought fit, a month before, to preclude me from that aſſembly, unleſs I choſe to be an intruder. If they act conſiſtently, they will alſo drop the names of half a dozen ſchoolmaſters and ſchoolmiſtreſſes in London and its vicinities; and of two or three-ſcore of the wealthieſt families in the Methodiſt connexion, for the ſame *atrocious crime*; namely, having their children and ſcholars taught carriage and addreſs by a dancing maſter. But I hope theſe will have patience and reſolution to bear with ſuch treatment, conſidering it as the fruit of ſuperſtitious zeal. And as a check for the impetuoſity of theſe brethren, I wiſh them to remember, They have not *now* the influence and power of Mr. Weſley to ſcreen their imprudencies, although they may think that they ſtand in his ſhoes:—they are not ſtationed here for life; and their acceptableneſs to, and uſefulneſs among their hearers, will more than ever be commenſurable with their piety and talents, their patience and prudence:—they will find it much

character, the ſucceſs of their labours, and the peace of the connexion. I wiſh them to keep at a diſtance as well from ſuperſtition as from ſin;—to ſpend their zeal and their ſtrength on the weightier matters of God's law;—and to evidence by the whole of their miniſtry and proceedings, that they have paſſed their novitiate ſtate both in the ſchool of Chriſt, and in the world.

much eaſier to ſcatter than to gather, to pronounce their fiat than to carry their point. M. D. by the help of God, will continue a friend to, and an occaſional preacher in, that religious connexion, in which he was an itinerant labourer before the names of theſe gentlemen were known; becauſe he prefers the cauſe of God and truth to every other conſideration;—becauſe his mind is particularly attatched to chriſtian friends, with ſome of whom he has joined in holy, happy worſhip for more than thirty-five years;—and becauſe, he as ſincerely deſires to "preſerve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace," as he is determined to "ſtand faſt in the liberty wherewith Chriſt hath made us free."

BRITISH
14 JY 74
MUSEUM

FINIS.